

COINS

New 50-cent coin coming, but collectors must half patience

By Roger Boye

This week's column answers more questions from readers about coins and currency.

Q—I'm told that the U.S. government will issue a special 50-cent coin this year made with silver. Where can I get one?—T. T., Chicago.

A—You'll have to be patient. Uncle Sam's chief engraver still is designing the commemorative half-dollar that will honor the 250th anniversary of George Washington's birth.

I'll report ordering details when they are announced, most likely sometime this summer. Each coin will be legal tender for 50 cents, will contain .36 of an ounce of silver and will cost between \$10 and \$12.

Q—For many years, we've owned two authentic \$20 bills issued by the Confederate States of America in 1863. Last week we decided to redeem them at a large Loop bank. The cashier called over an assistant manager, and to make a long story short, they refused to cash our bills. Where can we get our money?—L. J., Berwyn.

A—You're nearly 120 years too late. Confederate currency lost its monetary value with the South's surrender in 1865. The 14th Amendment to the Constitution forbids the payment of any obligation incurred in aid of insurrection against the United States, and says all such obligations are illegal and void.

Of course, your bills are collectors' items. For an appraisal, visit a few coin dealers or send me copies of each bill, making sure the serial numbers and dates are clear.

Q—Is there any central location, gov-

ernment agency or bank where a person could order rolls of uncirculated coins made at all the United States mints?—R. H., Flossmoor.

A—Not on a formal basis. The Chicago Federal Reserve Bank supplies coins to local banks for distribution to businesses as needed. Some collectors obtain rolls of freshly minted coins at face value from friendly bank tellers or store clerks. Other hobbyists buy the coins from dealers at a small premium.

Q—While checking pocket change, I discovered that Abe Lincoln has a doubled mouth on a 1980-D cent. Does my funny penny have any value?—Y. Br., Carbondale.

A—Examine the coin under high-powered magnification. Well-placed nicks or scratches can give Lincoln all sorts of weird facial features, but such cents are worth only one penny each.

If a die crack or other minting error caused the doubling, the coin might be worth as much as \$1 to a specialty collector.

Q—I read your Jan. 31 column about the rare printing error discovered on a few uncut sheets of dollar bills [the serial number on one bill in a sheet of 32 begins with a "B" instead of the normal "A"]. I own a sheet of 16 uncut bills and all 16 serial numbers begin with "B." Is it possible for this to be an error sheet?—J. S., Wimette.

A—No, your sheet is perfectly normal. Serial numbers on sheets of 16 uncut bills begin with "B," signifying the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. On sheets of 32 uncut bills sold last November, the serial numbers are supposed to start with an "A" for the bank of Boston.